

What is a Facilitator?

Adapted from Northwest Leader Corps curriculum.

Facilitate: to make easier; to free from obstruction or difficulty; to help bring about

Four Functions of a Facilitator

1. Encourage and ensure full participation of all group members
2. Promote mutual understanding
3. Foster inclusive practices and decisions
4. Facilitate new skills

Key Principles of Quality Facilitation

- ⇒ Believing that groups can make good decisions
- ⇒ Ensuring participation
- ⇒ Convening people as a neutral guide
- ⇒ Facilitating a shared sense of group goals and vision
- ⇒ Using effective processes
- ⇒ Utilizing diversity and wisdom
- ⇒ Continuous improvement
- ⇒ Ability to facilitate change inclusively
- ⇒ Working collaboratively with trust
- ⇒ Learning from experience

A Facilitator's Mind Set

- ⇒ **Participation and Observation:** Crafts the process and structure while observing body language, patterns of interaction, what works well with the group, etc.
- ⇒ **Curiosity and Inquiry:** Asks the group questions about what is happening and what needs to be happening.
- ⇒ **Belief in Participants and Group:** Focuses on the possibility of the group and the individual strengths and abilities participants bring to the group. Relies on those strengths and abilities throughout process.

Presentation Tips

- ⇒ Learn to relax. Each presentation is easier than the last as you build confidence and comfort.
- ⇒ Keep it warm and conversational. Don't complicate what may be simple.
- ⇒ Know your audience and appeal to its interests and needs.
- ⇒ Use visual aids that are stimulating and colorful for people who are not auditory learners.
- ⇒ Smile and be yourself. Let your personality shine through.
- ⇒ Try to make eye contact with the entire audience.
- ⇒ Capture your audience's attention by telling stories, giving personal examples, using humor, and quoting others.
- ⇒ Be enthusiastic. Your passion and integrity will capture your audience's interest.
- ⇒ Use powerful and creative openings and closings.
- ⇒ Do your homework and know what you're talking about.

Tips on Recording

- ⇒ Title your posters/flip-charts.
- ⇒ Alternate earth tones for your main colors (e.g. green, blue, purple, brown, black). Earth tones are generally easier to read, especially from a distance.
- ⇒ Highlight with light colors (e.g. red, pink, yellow, orange).
- ⇒ Use bullets instead of numbering. Using numbering can sometimes lead to participants thinking (consciously or subconsciously) that ideas are being ranked instead of simply listed.
- ⇒ Use abbreviations (e.g. ppl, grps, ldrshp)
- ⇒ Use symbols for words (e.g. \$ for money, ↑ for up, ↓ for down)
- ⇒ Use spacing. Leave white space between items.

Facilitation Sensibilities (created by the National Service Leadership Institute)

Don't open what you can't close.

Ensure there is sufficient group readiness and time available to explore and close new topics in a meaningful way.

Transfer ownership.

Enable groups to become increasingly self-sufficient by transferring to them decisions about how they will use and structure their time.

Assess openness.

A closed vessel cannot be filled with something new. Much of a facilitator's work starts with creating and assessing openness before offering new input.

Let go of the need to fix.

The individuals within a group own any perceived problems that surface. The facilitator's role is to serve as a resource in addressing what surfaces, but not to fix it.

Assess stages of cultural competence.

Continually assess your own and other's unique place along the cultural competence continuum as you observe what is said and done in the group. How can you maximize openness, understanding, and increased competency in progressing along the continuum?

Be a guide on the side, not a sage on the stage.

Your function is to serve as a resource so that others may discover their own wisdom, not to demonstrate all you know, or become the revered or lauded performer at the center.

Model transparency.

Speak the thinking, assumptions, and intentions behind your words relating to content, process, and relationships.

Ask "Is this about me?"

Question intentions behind your words and choices as a facilitator. Ask: Why am I saying this – to appear knowledgeable, competent, or right? How can I be of service to the group?

Ask "How are identities and power at play?"

Reflect on how you think your own age, class, disability, ethnicity, gender, primary language, race, religious affiliation or non-affiliation, sexual orientation, etc. influence how you view yourself, others, the curriculum, and group interactions. Utilize this awareness to inquire or speak in ways that support group members in exploring how their identities may also be at play.

Know yourself.

On-going self-reflection of who you are, how your identities, experiences, and assumptions shape how you see yourself, others, the curriculum, and group dynamics.

Make facilitation your daily practice.

We have opportunities to practice being facilitative all day long, with colleagues, friends, families, and strangers. How open, non-judgmental, attentive, etc. are you to others during the day?

Be present.

Opportunities for facilitative leadership often arise at unpredictable moments. If you are thinking about what you need to do next, or what happened an hour ago, you may lose sight of what is happening in that moment.

Translate my reactions.

Notice when you are making assumptions or judgments about something someone has said or not said. Speak the truth to yourself about those judgments, decide if it would be beneficial to speak, and mentally translate the judgment into a question or reflection that has opening dialogue rather than shutting it down as the goal.

Practice inquiry before advocacy.

Ask questions with the goal of supporting others in coming to their own deeper understanding rather than telling them what they should know or think. Questions that genuinely seek understanding are often helpful.

Acknowledge contributions.

Acknowledge another's perspectives before questioning or responding. If others first feel heard, they are likely to be more open to hearing another perspective that may cause them to question their own.

Listen deeply.

A goal is for others to feel heard which will enable us to be more open to moving to a deeper level of understanding.